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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are provided for integrating the trainable mentally handicapped (TMH) student into the regular classroom in the province of Alberta, Canada. Normalization and integration are explained with regard to the unique commitment undertaken in developing an integrated program for TMH students. Outlined are goals of the integrated program, such as access to nonhandicapped peer models. Three types of integration are noted, ranging from regular class placement to special class placement in a regular school. Briefly explained are roles of people involved in an integrated program, including the special and regular teacher and administrators. Seven suggestions are given for successful development of an integrated program; this is followed by a checklist for the regular classroom teacher's self preparation, and 10 suggestions for classroom management (e.g., give the student positive directions rather than telling him what not to do). A short reference list is provided. (MC)

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the trainable mentally handicapped student in the regular classroom

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. INTRODUCTION 1

B. GOALS OF AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM 1

C. TYPES OF INTEGRATION 2

D. PEOPLE INVOLVED IN AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM 2

E. SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTEGRATION PROGRAM 3

F. PREPARATION OF THE REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHER 4

G. SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT 5

H. CONCLUSION 5

I. REFERENCES 6

A. INTRODUCTION

The integration of the trainable mentally handicapped (T.M.H.) student into a regular classroom at any level demands a unique commitment on the part of all involved. Normalization, that is providing as normal a situation as possible, is the goal for handicapped people; integration is the method of achieving this goal.

Those who become involved in a program of integration should accept the philosophy of normalization, and the challenge of building relationships between the handicapped and the non-handicapped student. Integration has been defined as not just a physical coming together, but rather the relationship of people working together.

The following pages present some of the challenges and concerns involved in developing an integrated program.

B. GOALS OF AN INTEGRATED PROGRAM

In order to provide purpose and direction for the program it is essential that goals be developed. All handicapped students in integrated programs should have:

1. the same privileges as regular students their age;
2. access to non-handicapped peer models;
3. increased opportunity for independence;
4. normative behavior expectations;
5. special services without being segregated.

This will contribute to the development of a positive self-concept.

An integrated program provides non-handicapped students with the opportunity to:

1. become aware of the needs of handicapped persons;
2. assist, share and become friends with persons of varied abilities;
3. grow to recognize and respect similarities as well as differences in all people;
4. help handicapped people become less dependent by teaching them to cope in normal life situations.

Classroom teachers tend to emphasize academic achievement. However, for the T.M.H. student, academic achievement cannot be a high priority goal. Instead, the environment provided should be positive and secure, with the primary focus on communication and living/vocational skills. The most difficult task for the teacher is to accept that this student enters the classroom for a somewhat different purpose than the other students. In order to maintain a realistic perspective, the teacher must remember the points cited above at all times.

C. TYPES OF INTEGRATION

Several types of integration may be considered for the T.M.H. student. In the first type, the student will be placed in a regular class as his homeroom. He shares in all the privileges and responsibilities of belonging to that group. He may be taken out of the classroom for periods of specialized instruction by the special education teacher.

The second type of integration places the student in a segregated class as his homeroom and integrates him into a regular class for some subjects.

The third type provides space for a segregated class in a regular school. Integration takes place on an informal basis at recess, in assemblies or in hallways.

The degree and type of integration must be determined by considering each individual student, including his physical, emotional, social, and educational needs. Factors such as age, functioning level, degrees of independence and mobility, together with available staff and facilities, should all be considered. This requires a willingness to engage in trial runs, to evaluate continually and to make changes as needed. It is essential to identify the purpose of integration so that it provides a meaningful experience and is not done just for the sake of integration.

D. PEOPLE INVOLVED IN AN INTEGRATION PROGRAM

Integration involves the following people:

1. The students: Regular students will need adequate preparation prior to the handicapped student's arrival to become aware of his needs and to learn to accept him as one of their peers.

2. The classroom teacher: The classroom teacher is a key person in the program. It is in his classroom setting that the integration actually takes place. To a large measure, its success will depend on him. He will be a model for the students as he makes them aware of each other's needs. He should assist the T.M.H. student in establishing links with the non-handicapped world. The educational setting must be safe and secure; it must be one which fosters the growth and development of each student's self-concept.

3. The special education teacher: The special education teacher and the classroom teacher should establish a close working relationship. In most cases, it will be the responsibility of the special education teacher to develop an individualized program and implement curricular objectives for specific life skills. Assessment and evaluation of the total program will also be a concern. The special education teacher is a primary resource to the classroom teacher as they share in the education of the T.M.H. student.

4. Teacher aides: Teacher aides are a necessary resource for the successful implementation of integration. Working under the direction of the regular class teacher they can serve a number of functions:
   - assist the T.M.H. student to participate in class activities;
   - adapt materials to meet individual needs;
   - set up activity centres or learning stations;
   - provide individual and small group drill and practice to facilitate mastery and necessary over-learning.

5. Other resources: Involvement of representatives from agencies and groups such as Alberta Social Services and Community Health (Services for the Handicapped), Association for the Mentally Handicapped, or Alberta Education will depend on the needs of the student and also the services available to the area. The multi-handicapped student will need specialized services and equipment; the classroom teacher may be the one to secure such or make the appropriate referral. (See Special Education Handbook section, "Working With Support Staff".)

6. Parents: Parents of the T.M.H. student form an essential part of the integration team. They can provide valuable information about their child and assist in reinforcing life skills at home. The classroom teacher should establish a close relationship with them. Parents can also provide assistance by coming into the classroom to talk to students or work with them.

7. Administration: Basic to successful implementation of an integration program is the acceptance and support of all levels of administration. The school board, superintendent and principal should be supportive, cooperative and involved. They need to be aware of the increased responsibilities placed upon their teachers, and provide time and assistance to deal with these additional tasks. They should realize the financial implications of smaller class enrollments, preparation time, the need for teacher aides for the integrated classroom, and other support personnel.

E. SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INTEGRATION PROGRAM

Integration of T.M.H. students into the regular classroom may generate feelings of apprehension and insecurity in the classroom teacher. He may be concerned about the availability of support services, lack of specialized training, class size, preparation time for individualized programming, and evaluation procedures.

In order to develop a successful program these questions and concerns must be alleviated as much as possible. A support group, consisting of principal, central office representative, special education teacher, classroom teacher, parent, and other appropriate people, should be established to give the program support and direction. This group should know and be aware of each student's special needs, assist in making decisions concerning placement and give support and assistance to the teacher directly involved. The support group could also promote programs of inservice training for teachers, students, parents, and the community, to make them aware of the needs of mentally handicapped students.

When considering the development of a successful integration program the support group should:

1. determine each student's individual needs, strengths and limitations;

2. consider which type of integration program would benefit him;

3. discuss strengths and weaknesses of present staff and facilities available in relationship to the needs of the student;

4. determine what special assistance will be required for integration;

5. determine suitable placement and also alternative courses of action;

6. outline basic objectives of integration and procedure for evaluation;

7. decide on length of trial period and set date of evaluation.

All these are necessary elements, providing the structure and flexibility necessary to make the program successful.

F. PREPARATION OF THE REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHER

Every teacher who accepts the challenge of working in an integrated program should ask himself the following questions:

1. Am I prepared to accept and try to understand this student?

2. Do I accept the philosophy and realize the benefits of normalization?

3. Am I willing to deal with my concerns and seek the help of others as needed?

4. Am I willing to devote time to a self-education program which will assist me in relating to these students?

5. Am I prepared to adapt my teaching style to meet the needs of this student?

There are various publications, university courses, and special education workshops available for teachers to become acquainted with the needs and capabilities of mentally handicapped students. There are materials available for use in the classroom to inform students of the needs of handicapped persons. The initiative must be on the part of the teacher to make his needs known and encourage inservice training in his school division.

The second step of teacher preparation is to know the student. Before the student comes to the classroom, the teacher should review his file, meet his parents, visit his home, and talk to people who have previously worked with him in order to know what to expect before the student comes into the classroom. He will have interests and background experiences for the teacher to build upon and will respond better to some motivators than others. He may also have special problems and difficulties of which the teacher should be aware.

Thirdly, the classroom teacher should also know and use the support systems. He should encourage the administration to form a support group, use their services, and share his concerns with them. Also, he will need their support and encouragement. There are many resource people available whose help must be secured especially when dealing with multiple or specialized handicaps.

G. SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Those working with the T.M.H. student should:

1. Provide success experiences which will aid in the development of a positive self-concept;

2. Give the student positive directions rather than telling him what not to do;

3. Remember the importance of structure and routine in the classroom to give students a feeling of security and confidence;

4. Give students frequent recognition and support, and tell them what is good about their work;

5. Have the T.M.H. student work with another student in a "buddy" system in group activities;

6. Break down tasks into small steps which are manageable for the student. Provide relevant individualized activities so he can finish on his own and experience the feeling of having completed the project;

7. Adapt materials to the student's ability and provide assistance when necessary;

8. Develop questions from simple to complex in a group discussion, allowing the mentally handicapped student to take some part in the lesson. Rephrase and clarify points as the discussion continues;

9. Try to use real-life situations and concrete materials as much as possible. Much of what is taken for granted in non-handicapped students, must be taught over and over again to those who are handicapped;

10. Provide opportunities for choice and a reasonable degree of risk;

11. Ascertain whether medical problems are present and secure help if necessary.

H. CONCLUSION

Integration of the T.M.H. student into the regular school system is a goal that can be attained through the commitment of dedicated persons who care about the needs and development of all students. Teachers, parents, and school administrators should work together to bring about a positive relationship between the handicapped and the non-handicapped. Integration is the building of such a relationship so that all may grow in self-esteem and develop their full potential.

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